Love So Perfectly Dangerous

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Love So Perfectly Dangerous

by Metaphysicalash

Summary

Hannibal didn't quite expect to meet a sassy and self-assured FBI profiler, and he sure as hell didn't expect to fall for him in such a short time. Neither did Will. And Will had always been the one to shy away from love because he wanted to avoid heartbreak. But Hannibal's gravitational pull is out of this world. As Will takes Hannibal's help to understand a serial killer he's chasing, he also gets closer to Hannibal.

And the closer he gets, the stranger he feels. Like there's something off about the man he's fallen in love with so quickly. He knows he wants the answers, but he's not sure if he'll like what he'll find.

And if those answers would ruin what he had with Hannibal.

Notes

This thing has been sitting in my laptop for a year. Literally a year, and I feel so bad, so I finally finished it. Finally.

Have this. Always wanted to write a sassy, bold Will Graham. :)

Chapter 1

Jack Crawford admired the psychiatrist's lavish office, smiling as he looked around at the perfectly organized, well-maintained space, with large windows, striped red and white curtains, and a library on top. Several accolades adorned the walls in golden frames, testaments to Hannibal Lecter's psychiatric prowess.

Hannibal was pouring the two of them a glass of Prieuré Roch Rosé.

"Quite a workspace you have here, Dr. Lecter," said Jack.

"Everything I need in one place. I try to keep organized," Hannibal handed him a glass. "I wish you told me you were coming much sooner, Agent Crawford."

"My bad." Jack received the drink. "I wouldn't have come if it wasn't a necessity. I need your help in catching a serial killer. Or rather, I need you to help one of my men catch the serial killer."

"Yes, you told me. Will Graham was his name, if I recall."

"Yeah. He's a profiler, and he's kind of… complicated. He can get a little cocky at times, but he's the best we got."

"I see. You want me to help him see the killer's face."

"More or less." Jack sipped the wine. "I hear you're the best at what you do."

Hannibal smiled. "I endeavor to be."

"Well, it's enough. Besides, we got our hands full with the Chesapeake Ripper case too. We need all the help we can get."

Hannibal nodded once. His inscrutable countenance and fathomless amber eyes gave away nothing.

Jack glanced at his watch. "I should go. Sorry I can't stay, and apologies for the short notice."

"That's quite alright."

Jack took a big sip of the wine before placing the half-finished glass on the small table next to the leather chairs. "The wine's great. Thank you, Dr. Lecter."

"It's my pleasure, Agent."

Jack walked briskly out of the office and Hannibal shut the door after him.

He turned around and looked at his office, having seen it thousands of times before. It carried an air of familiarity much similar to home. It was a second home to him, in fact. Being a cannibal in secret didn't come without its risks, which was where his job came in. It complemented his morbid, mysterious life. He liked being a psychiatrist as much as he thrived on being a serial killer. Besides, his profession also acted as the perfect cover.

Therefore no, he wouldn't say his life was mundane, but he admitted something was missing. However, this missing piece to his well thought-out life, remained a mystery to him. Sometimes seeing patients all day in a row would get tedious, and although Hannibal carried himself well, his boredom at times shone through in the way he glanced at his watch during sessions, or took deep breaths while listening to the long stories of patients.

At times however, there were some interesting patients too. Those with dark tendencies particularly appealed to him. He was always intrigued with the criminally minded.

However, no matter how he tried to fill this void, whether it be through art, music or culinary explorations, the missing piece remained at the forefront of his mind.

Then there was the whole subject of the Chesapeake Ripper.

The case had been stretching for a long time, the cops were getting nowhere, and probably never would. It was way beyond their comprehension. To catch the Chesapeake Ripper, they had to understand him first. Get into his mind. Hannibal highly doubted anyone was capable of that.

As he kept his wine glass next to Jack's on the small table, his ears picked up the sound of footsteps outside, followed by a knock on the door.

He went to open it, and for a fleeting moment, stopped when he saw the man at the threshold.

The man was immaculately and sharply dressed just like Hannibal—sporting a blue three-piece suit, a pristine white shirt, a grey tie and black shoes.

For the first time in his life, Hannibal's heart skipped a beat, and he couldn't put a finger on why. Maybe it was the man's poise, or the soft chocolate curls of his hair. Maybe it was the neatly groomed stubble, or his provocative pink lips…

Perhaps it was the oceanic eyes, holding something secret in the depths of their blues that trapped Hannibal in an invisible snare. A beautiful, but dangerous snare.

"Agent Graham," Hannibal said, effectively pulling himself to focus.

"Will's just fine," came a husky response.

"Please come in. Will."

With his hands in his trouser pockets, Will brushed past Hannibal. A sultry, earthy fragrance emanated from him. Hannibal inhaled the scent of Oud, and hints of Sandalwood, much like his own preferred perfume. The fragrance captivated him as did Will's presence. The second the profiler walked into the office, the atmosphere changed, like flipping the switch in a dark

room. Hannibal sensed it. He closed the door, staring at Will with the utmost fascination. He barely knew him and yet, he was inexplicably drawn to him.

Will spotted the two glasses of wine on the table. Inadvertently picking up Hannibal's glass, he drank it without a second thought. A slight smile flickered across Hannibal's face. Will drinking out of his glass like an indirect kiss piqued his interest.

"That's great wine." Will kept the glass down. "I suppose Jack's told you all about me."

"Only that you needed my help with a serial killer," Hannibal replied. "Please have a seat."

Hannibal unbuttoned his pinstripe suit as he sat on the leather sofa, while Will sat on the sofa across from him. The two crossed their legs at the same time, in perfect synchronicity.

"I've heard a lot about you," Will said.

"I'm certain you have. Depends on whom you've heard it from."

"The FBI. I heard you're the best."

"Is that what you think or are you paraphrasing someone else?"

"I'm sure those opinions are true, but I wanted to see for myself."

"Shall we discuss the case then? This killer you're looking for. What do you know about him?"

Will tilted his head and glanced at the armrest, running his hand along the leather. "The killer is quite… colorful. The first victim we found had his stomach slashed, his eyes stabbed and two red orchids placed on them."

"The color red is symbolic of strong feelings. Love, desire, passion, anger. Red roses and orchids share a similar meaning."

"The killing did seem personal. Doesn't look like a crime of passion, but I did feel a strange sense of… love. Not particularly towards the victim, of course."

Hannibal studied Will's body language, his speech, his facial features, the way his blue gaze flitted, his thin lips curving up slightly as he spoke. Just the sound of his voice left Hannibal wanting to listen to him speak for hours. There was something incredibly beguiling about it.

"Who do you think it's for?" Hannibal asked.

"Not sure, yet," Will replied. "The second victim had his heart carved out of his chest and placed in his hands, like he was offering it to someone as a gift. Like he was surrendering himself to them."

"The killer must be trying to send a message."

“I suspect that. The third victim, which we discovered today, was burned alive. The victims don’t have anything in common so far, aside from the fact they were all murdered near lakesides in three different locations. All of them… killed so intimately.”

“Anything done out of love is always intimate, one way or another.”

Will half-smiled. “You ever been in love, Doctor Lecter?”

“The feeling is familiar to me.” *Yet, he never had the good fortune of loving someone.*

Will hummed, swiping his tongue slowly along his bottom lip.

Something ignited in Hannibal’s core. “Have you been in love?”

“Not sure I can call it love,” Will replied. “Alana doesn’t think we’re compatible.”

“Dr. Alana Bloom?”

“Yes.”

“I see. And how did that make you feel?”

“Is this session about me or helping me find the serial killer?”

“It is whatever you want it to be, Will.”

Will lowered his voice. “Sounds nice when you say my name, Doctor Lecter.”

While it was clearly not the appropriate time to flirt, the profiler clearly did not hold any reservations. One might have thought he wasn’t concerned about the case at all.

Hannibal found himself lost in the blue waters, staring longer than necessary. Will's eyes observed him as much as he did them, following his every movement, no matter how tiny it was. The more he spoke to Will, the more he gravitated towards him. As it turned out, Will was an empath. A powerful one at that. His ability to put himself in the killer’s shoes, understand how they felt and thought, what their motives might be, and how they carried out the murders, fascinated Hannibal to no end. He listened intently while Will went over the finer details of the murders, as well as the workings of the killer’s mind. The mind of a lover, most likely taking revenge. Trying to communicate through the murders.

Hannibal was usually aware of the time, but in this moment, time was irrelevant.

“I feel like a freak,” Will said. “I suppose that would come in the job description when you have a mind as damaged as mine.”

“Damaged isn’t the word I’d use,” Hannibal replied almost immediately. “No one can see what you’re capable of. They don’t understand how special you are, and maybe, neither do you. You’re not a freak. It’s not your fault that people fail to see your radiance.”

Will frowned. “It’s the first time someone’s told me that. Apologies if I don’t reciprocate those sentiments. My abilities feel more like a curse to me, waking me up every night. I feel out of place… like I don’t belong anywhere.”

“You belong here.”

“Do I?”

“There’s no reason you don’t. This is a neutral space. There’s no judgment here. You can be whoever you want to be.”

There was that hypnotizing smile on Will’s face again, compelling Hannibal to smile back. Will took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, relaxing in his chair. In this space, he truly was free to be himself. Hannibal meant every word. Hannibal failed to grasp why someone as brilliantly unique as Will Graham would feel out of place. If anything, he should be standing out from the rest. He should be respected, worshiped, even. At least, that was Lecter’s personal view. It was hard to be professional around Will, to stop himself from using his own personal bias, but he couldn’t help it.

He couldn’t deny he was a bit disappointed when their session came to an end. And while Will had been punctual and maximized their time together, the session was far too short.

“Looks like my time is up.” Will rose from the chair. “Tomorrow, then. Hopefully, I’ll have new leads.”

Hannibal stood. “Hopefully.”

Will smirked a little, walking to him. He let a hand out. “Been a pleasure, Doctor Lecter.”

There was a spark of electricity when their fingers brushed, a warmth when their hands joined.

Hannibal shook his hand. “The pleasure is all mine… Will.”

Will’s grip tightened just a little, his forefinger brushing over the veins in Hannibal’s wrist, leaving tiny goosebumps on his skin. He caught Hannibal off guard when he inched closer—too close—until Hannibal could see the pores of his skin. Hannibal’s pulse picked up pace when Will inhaled his scent and slowly exhaled, making the hairs at the back of Hannibal’s neck rise. Will’s blue eyes—a kaleidoscope of ocean hues—then met his gaze, their noses almost brushing.

“You smell nice,” Will whispered.

Hannibal parted his lips and drew a breath, inching back a little so his eyes homed in on Will’s lips. The man smelled just as amazing.

“See you tomorrow.” Will moved back, his hand slipping free from Hannibal’s.

He turned and headed for the door, leaving Hannibal rooted to his spot, trying to figure out who this man was who blatantly flirted with him and did what no one else could—

Enthrall him.

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Fortunately, it didn't end there. The more Will showed up to his following sessions, the more Hannibal learned about him. The more he learned, the more he found himself exploring the singularity that was Will Graham.

It was endlessly riveting, the way Will reconstructed crime scenes and played out exactly how the murders happened in his head. He had a rare gift, despite his self-deprecating thoughts. It was refreshing for Hannibal to have intellectual conversations with someone for the first time in a long time, conversations that flowed as smooth as a river. Conversations that explored the nuances of the human mind, the facets of behavior. The way criminals thought and acted. It was Hannibal's area of expertise and Will Graham continuously impressed him with his insights.

Hannibal found himself falling for him sooner than he had anticipated. A sort of powerful, profound attraction increasing with time. Will's flirtatious nature did not aid matters.

"The victims have no connection to each other." Will paced about the office. "There has to be some kind of a common link. That's what I'm trying to find."

"Perhaps they were past acquaintances of the killer. Maybe his friends."

"Or they could be connected… intimately."

Hannibal drew in a breath. "I'm sensing jealousy has a role to play here."

"Most likely. There's a kind of… obsessive love."

"People do crazy things for love. Might seem unjustifiable to the world, but not to them."

"You think what the killer did is justified?"

"I'm saying love is a grey area. Wouldn't you kill someone for love?"

Will stopped walking for a brief moment. "I don't know."

"I think, if put in a difficult situation, we would do whatever it takes. If we had someone we deeply loved, we would do anything for them."

"Doesn't mean the killer was right." Will paused, observing the office. "It's strange. He's gone quiet for days now. Maybe he's trying to keep a low profile."

"It's entirely possible."

"You said I could be whoever I wanted to be in here."

"I meant it."

Will walked back to the leather sofa and sat, leaning back and spreading his legs wide apart. “I’ll be myself then. Not the profiler. Just… someone who wants to know more about you, Doctor.”

Hannibal smiled slightly. He couldn’t tell if Will was being deliberately seductive or not, but either way, whatever he was doing worked like a charm. The profiler wasn’t the least bit perturbed about the case, either.

“Knowing me might cause our worlds to collide,” Hannibal said. “The impact would be drastic.”

“I thought they had already collided.”

“Not exactly. Not yet."

“I want to know you anyway. What made you a psychiatrist?”

“I was once a surgeon. Somebody died on my watch. After that, I felt my skills were better suited to psychiatry. Nobody dies.” *Sort of.*

“Things like that happen in a surgeon’s line of work.”

“Happened too often with me.”

Will leaned forward, bringing his hands together and interlacing his fingers. “There’s something about you I can’t fathom. Part of me feels like I wouldn’t like what I find. The other part wants to know anyway."

Dragging Will into his world would have consequences. In that aspect, Will was right—he wouldn’t like what he found. And yet, Hannibal was tempted to share his secrets with him. He wanted Will in his world. Will was unique, intelligent, disarming, and the fact that he was attracted to Hannibal too made Hannibal want him all the more.

“You’re not the first person I got attracted to,” Will said. “But I’ve never been drawn to someone this much before. I’m not sure attraction is the right word for this.”

“It’s inexplicable,” Hannibal replied.

“Might be a mistake.”

“Is that what you feel?”

“I’m not sure.” Will’s gaze lowered a bit. “I can’t avoid it. I don’t want to. I do wish our sessions lasted longer.”

“I can make adjustments to the duration, if you wish.”

Hannibal was a stickler for time management. He wouldn’t normally stray from an allotted time for an appointment, so it was surprising to even him that he would make such a consideration for Will.

Then again, Hannibal wanted to spend more time with him too.

Will seemed to ponder about it. “No, it’s fine.”

“This session was never about the case,” Hannibal said.

“The case was an excuse. We are chasing leads, but… somehow I can’t put my unwavering focus on it.”

Will took his suit from the armrest and stood.

“Will,” Hannibal said, rising to his feet as well. “You can always stop by my house if you like.”

Hannibal walked over to his desk, reaching for a piece of paper and writing his residential address down.

Receiving the piece of paper from him, Will gave a little nod. “I’ll think about it.”

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A knock on the door, and Hannibal went to open it, pleasantly surprised to see Will standing there with a bottle of Rosé. Dressed in a wine red shirt and black trousers that made him look bewitching. His brown, wavy hair was immaculate as usual.

“Will,” Hannibal said.

“Is it too late for a drink?” Will asked. “Or should I get an appointment first?”

“For you, I can make an exception. Please come in.”

Will walked in, his coat draped on his arm. He looked around Hannibal’s lavish home and then walked into his kitchen, placing the bottle on the counter.

“Nice place you have here,” he said.

“I have an eye for aesthetics,” Hannibal replied, prolonging his gaze upon Will.

“So I see.”

“Would you like some chocolate mousse? I have made far too much for just myself alone."

“Sure.”

Hannibal brought two plates of the dessert onto the counter, sprinkling the final chocolate touches as Will watched on in silence.

“I find it hard to believe you came here on a whim,” Hannibal said.

“I couldn’t get you off my mind,” Will replied.

Hannibal looked up at him. There was something in the way Will stared at him, like he was seducing, ensnaring his prey with a single bold look. If that was the case, it was working effectively. Hannibal placed one of the plates in front of Will, along with a spoon. Will exhaled and leaned on the table. Instead of using the spoon, he swiped the chocolate with his finger and put it in his mouth, sucking it clean. Hannibal watched in silent amusement at how this bewitching creature sent tingles coursing through his body.

“It’s delicious,” Will said. “I hear you’re the master of cooking.”

“I’d like to show you,” Hannibal replied.

“Some other time, maybe.” Will paused. “I should go home, I sleep little as it is. It’s the nightmares.”

“The same recurring ones about the killer?”

“I can feel him scooping my eyes out, and placing orchids in them. I can feel the blood spewing from my body when he stabs me. It’s all too vivid. I’m already lost in the nightmare before I can dissociate myself from it.”

“It’s the side effects of being an empath. You have a gift so powerful it threatens to overpower your mind if you don’t have it under control.”

“I can’t control it. I feel unstable”

“Yes, you can, if you want to. You’re stronger than you think. You only need to convince yourself of that. Your mind will find a way.”

Will smiled, then slowly walked around the counter, fingers skimming along the cool marble surface as he got close to Hannibal. Hannibal’s gaze homed in on those red kissable lips.

“Nobody ever understood me,” Will said. “Nobody tried. I’m simply a tool to help them solve their problems. My abilities are tools.”

“You’re not obligated to serve as a tool for anyone, Will. They should be the ones who serve you. If you wanted, you could conquer them. You could conquer anything.”

Will was usually nonchalant. Hannibal learned it was a defense mechanism. A way to mask Will’s vulnerabilities and avoid pain. The world he lived in warranted nonchalance, but Hannibal was the first one who persuaded him to embrace his vulnerabilities rather than hide them, who showed him the gift behind what he deemed to be a curse.

And for the first time, it seemed Will’s heart opened up. The veil he hid behind lifted. He allowed himself to relax when he knew he could be himself around Hannibal. He didn’t know how much he needed that until Hannibal gave him that freedom.

In return, Will gave him feelings he couldn’t decipher. Feeling Hannibal had never felt before. Feelings that came crashing down in an overwhelming wave of passion as Will’s lips collided with his own.

Their lips melted into each other, sucking and tugging. Will opened Hannibal's lips with his and deepened the kiss, sliding his tongue over Hannibal's. Heat pooled inside Hannibal's stomach, blooming all over like a radiant flower. He dropped the spoon with a clatter and grabbed Will's waist, pulling him closer, pressing his body to his.

Will tasted so sweet.

Will's lips smacked softly as he tilted his head, grabbing a fistful of Hannibal's red sweater. His hands sliding down, slipping inside the hem and pushing it up. Hannibal shuddered and pulled away from the kiss. Will exhaled, eyes darting between Hannibal's lips and his gaze, as if snapping out of a trance.

"I… should go," he whispered.

"You don't have to," Hannibal murmured, kissing the corners of Will's lips. "You can stay."

"Maybe next time."

"Don't let your mind hold you back. Let your heart take the wheel."

Will sighed, cupping Hannibal's face with one hand and kissing him slowly, passionately. Then peeled away just as slow.

"I want you. But…"

"But what?" Hannibal whispered.

"I'm… confused." Will inched back. "It's best if we save this for another time."

He moved away, fingers brushing with Hannibal's. He walked out of the kitchen, leaving Hannibal empty and disappointed, and thoroughly aroused at the same time. His cock lay semi-hard in his pajamas. His breathing had shallowed.

And his heart…

Will took it with him when he left.

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Another body showed up. A man who looked to be in his early thirties lay washed up on the shore of a lake, skin pale, cold and wet, eyes carved out of their sockets and red orchids planted in the empty holes. A few more orchids lay scattered near the corpse. Multiple stab wounds marked his body, scarlet blood staining his grey shirt. Will tilted his head, staring at the blood, feeding his morbid mind. That, along with the red orchids which served as a twisted expression of amour fou and an insatiable passion. Will's subconscious drew him to thoughts of Hannibal. All it took was a kiss to unlock something in his heart—something he couldn't put a name to, a kind of concupiscence.

He picked up one of the orchids, twirling it slowly between his thumb and forefinger.

Red as blood.

Red as passion.

Red as—

“Will?”

Will momentarily forgot he was at a crime scene, in front of a literal corpse. His mind would draw him back to that moment in Hannibal’s kitchen, the chocolate mousse, the enrapturing stares, the feeling of the other man’s breath upon his skin. The feel of his warmth, his throbbing pulse beneath his fingertips when Will pressed them to his wrist. When Will closed his eyes, he remembered the smell of him, the heady, woody scent lingering around him. He remembered the sweet taste of those lips…

“Will.” came a voice beside him. Louder this time.

He looked to his left to see Beverly standing there, eyebrows raised.

“You alright?” she asked.

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Well, you weren’t paying attention to anything I was saying.”

Will frowned. “What were you saying?”

Beverly shook her head. “I was asking if you got something from the victim.”

Will was usually attentive. This was the first time his brain was occupied with something else. Hannibal had seized his mind and held it captive.

“Something, perhaps,” he replied. “All these killings look like declarations of love. The killer didn’t choose the victims at random. There had to be a reason.”

“We did a thorough check of their backgrounds,” Beverly said. “There’s no common link.”

Will stared at the red orchid in his hand. “Maybe a woman. See if the victims have been seeing anyone in the weeks prior to their deaths. Look into their social lives.”

“Alright. It’s gonna take a while.”

Will kept the red orchid on the body and left. He wasn’t the least bit interested in sticking around and investigating further because he knew there was no point, and he wasn’t interested either. His tendency to get disinterested and distracted often frustrated Jack Crawford, but Will’s immaculate track record at solving cases kept Jack's temper at bay.

Will got into his car and drove. It wasn’t professional at all, nor was it appropriate to be leaving the crime scene just like that but…

God help him because he couldn't stop himself.

…

Will couldn't describe the instantaneous attraction he felt the first time he laid eyes on Hannibal Lecter without sounding like a horny teenager. He drank that Rosé on purpose, acting slightly flirty. The flirtation definitely went up a notch in the recent sessions. There was something about Hannibal that was… different. Enigmatic. Will loved an enigma. He loved having puzzles to solve and Hannibal was the most titillating puzzle of them all. He didn't know why he drove all the way to the doctor's office from the crime scene. All he knew was that he was drawn and wanted to see him.

Will suppressed a smile when Hannibal opened the door at the right moment. Almost as though Hannibal had been waiting for this moment all day.

"Will," he said. "I wasn't expecting you."

"Hope I'm not interrupting anything," Will said.

"Not at all. My patient was just leaving."

Hannibal let him in.

Will saw a middle-aged woman putting on her coat, and checking her handbag. He gave her a smile as he walked past and leaned against Hannibal's desk, his hands gripping the edges as he sat upon its ledge. While the woman's attention turned towards the door as she stuffed a bunch of tissues inside her handbag, Hannibal's focus shifted to Will. Will spread his thighs apart, slowly unbuttoning his waistcoat. Hannibal eyed the last button as Will popped it open, before his gaze dropped shamelessly to his crotch. In that moment, Will knew his seduction was working.

"Next week, then, doctor?" the woman asked.

Hannibal tore his gaze away from Will. "Yes. See you on Monday, Mrs. Rowland."

The woman left and Hannibal closed the door behind her before facing Will.

"I'm assuming this isn't about the case. Again."

"Does it always have to be?" Will asked.

"Not necessarily, although I never expect you to make a social visit."

"It was a spur-of-the-moment decision. I was at the crime scene today, and… lost track."

Hannibal walked towards him. "I see. Any new leads? Do the victims have anything in common?"

"Not yet. I have a hunch that I asked Beverly to look into it. Then I came here." Will sighed, approaching close. "I haven't been able to stop thinking about you Doctor Lecter. What have

you done to me?"

Hannibal smiled. "It's too early to say I've done anything substantial. Though I have tried to show you who you are, and why you are special."

"That could be it."

Will hummed, leaning in close enough to smell Hannibal. He inhaled deeply, letting the woody scent of Hannibal's cologne along with his unique musk invade his olfactory senses, sending electricity to his brain, heart and loins.

He skimmed his hands down Hannibal's arms. "You are something else."

"I'll take that as a compliment," Hannibal replied.

"I'd call you interesting too. But interesting doesn't even begin to skim the surface."

Will pressed a kiss to the corner of his lips, letting the stubble of his beard graze Hannibal's smooth, silk skin.

Normally, Will held reservations for intimate relationships. Even the attraction he felt towards Alana seemed incomplete, like it was missing something. He had figured it might be intimacy after kissing her one day, and feeling no effect. The kiss felt shallow, for lack of a better word, as though their feelings weren't strong enough to pull their souls together. As such, it was hard to please Will. He failed to find anyone on the same plane as him.

That is until he met Hannibal.

All it took was a few sessions to lure him in like a moth to a flame. To have found someone who could see right through the layers of complexity that made up the person he was, who could decipher him. It was rare for Will to fall for someone so quickly and easily, but there he was.

Oh, he fell, alright.

Hannibal kissed him this time, a lot fiercer than Will did. His mouth enveloped Will's, while Will fumbled with his waistcoat, prying it off. Somehow, he managed it without breaking the kiss. Hannibal was swift with his own clothes. His suit and waistcoat were promptly on the floor before moving his attention to Will's clothes in the same haste.

As Will perched himself on the table, Hannibal snaked an arm around his body, pressing him close as he sucked and tasted the skin on his neck. He sunk his teeth, tasting him further, simultaneously drawing a moan from Will. Leaning back, he braced a hand on the table. Hannibal lowered himself enough to lift Will's thigh and place it on his shoulder, licking a path along its inner side. Will promptly stopped Hannibal before he could go further; pulling him up by his collar to face him.

Hannibal could have his way if he wanted, but he seemed to give in to Will's desires instead. Whenever Will kissed him, he returned it with twice the intensity, as if trying to one-up him.

Will tugged Hannibal's shirt and walked him backwards to the couch, pushing him down on it. Silver strands of hair fell on Hannibal's darkened, lustful eyes. The look in them gave Will goosebumps.

Hannibal licked his bottom lip while Will deftly undid Hannibal's trousers and unbuttoned his shirt. Will flung off the remaining halves of the shirt away, revealing his toned, robust chest, finely dusted with silver hair. Will's fingers tingled with the need to touch and the doctor did not deny him the privilege. Running his hands up Hannibal's warm body, Will took his nipple into his mouth and tugged it with his teeth, eliciting a low growl from Lecter.

Will went for Hannibal's trousers and briefs, pulling them down to free his cock, taking a second to revel in its beautifully thick girth. He wanted to take it slow, as it deserved to be savored, but his hunger didn't let him.

He ran a fist along the hard flesh, stroking it while he shot Hannibal a lascivious look. Hannibal's hips jerked, and he leaned his head back against the sofa, his Adam's apple bobbing. His mouth fell open and a sharp breath escaped. His fingers curled on the sofa, as if trying to find purchase, something to hold onto firmly. His chest rose and fell with each heavy breath. It was all so incredibly tempting for Will. He wanted to bite into that chest and ride Hannibal till they both came but first…

First, he wanted a taste of him.

Steadily stroking Hannibal's cock, Will drew a trickle of pre-cum, which he swiped his tongue over, and licked clean. Giving in to the urge inside, he took the length into his mouth and began to suck, slowly, head bobbing up and down. Hannibal grabbed his hair, clenching his curls. He thrust his hips forward, pushing himself deeper into Will's mouth. Will moaned, stroking the base of Hannibal's cock as he sucked hard.

It had always been this way for Will—all or nothing. Always on the extremes, even as an empath. There was no in-between. He wasted no time with that. Before Hannibal, he hadn't met anyone he thought worthy of giving his all. Hannibal was the first to have that privilege.

Will's hardened erection leaked and he knew he couldn't hold himself back for too much longer. Yet, he did; wanting Hannibal to come in his mouth first. He felt Hannibal jerk again, stiffen, tighten his grip on Will's hair. A low grunt escaped Hannibal's mouth as he came, spilling hotly onto Will's tongue.

Oh, he tasted so good. Will swallowed the offering, taking his mouth off Hannibal's erection with a smack. He half-grinned at him as he wiped a trickle of white from the corner of his lips. Hannibal's chest heaved, mouth open as he panted.

"I'm not done yet," Will said.

"I wasn't counting on it," Hannibal replied, breathy.

He wasn't being the least bit subtle when he brazenly eyed Will's engorged cock, curving upwards to attention.

Will enjoyed Hannibal's fixated eyes, focusing on him and him only. He didn't have to do much for that. He could see how enamored Hannibal was already from the look on his face.

Despite his exertion, Hannibal was still hard. Will climbed on the couch, grabbed the Doctor's hand, brought it up to his mouth and sucked on his index and middle fingers. Hannibal's breath hitched as Will guided the lubricated fingers down to his hot tight hole. Forcing the breach of two fingers at a time, Will hissed as he manipulated Hannibal's hand in and out of his ass. Hannibal took cue and began to gently scissor, opening Will up, preparing him for what was to come.

After minutes of working himself open with Lecter's hand, Will sat astride his lap, holding Hannibal's slickened cock, and slowly pushed it inside him while closing his eyes and feeling the stretch. Hannibal flexed his fingers on Will's hips, gripping them like a vise as he watched his cock sink inside Will smoothly. Both of them exhaling sharply.

"Oh God," Will moaned.

He moved, whimpering at how thick and full Hannibal was inside him, stretching his hole wide. The initial burn was brief and soon replaced with sweet bliss. He skimmed his hands across Hannibal's taut chest again, feeling the hair on it, then fondled his way down his abs. Leaning in, Will kissed him with little finesse. Sloppy and open-mouthed, and yet, amazing.

"God, yes," Will groaned against Hannibal's mouth. "You feel so much better than I imagined."

"You do too," Hannibal breathed.

"H-harder Han—"

Hannibal's eyes darkened and he thrust his hips up, pounding hard into him.

"Ah!" Will cried out, eyes rolling back.

His body burned hot, and his cock throbbed. Hannibal aimed and struck his prostate over and over, pushing him over the edge. He clasped the sides of Will's body and leaned forward, sinking his teeth in his chest. Will grabbed his hair this time, clenching the silvery strands in his fist. He jerked a little as Hannibal bit his nipple before sucking it.

Maybe it was all a little too fast. Will had opened himself up—body, heart and mind—to Hannibal without knowing the man completely well. For all he knew, he could be making a grave mistake, but he wasn't in the state of mind to rationalize right now. He had succumbed to a powerful, blazing hot desire, and he wanted more. He seemed to have given himself up to the doctor against his better judgment. Hell, his sense of judgment was clouded at the moment, his mind and heart echoing Hannibal's name like a mantra, until it escaped his mouth.

"Hannibal," he exhaled, as the doctor kissed his chest, his hand splayed out on Will's back.

Will pressed his body against him, feeling the feverish heat of his skin. Hannibal's strokes got harder, getting closer to the end. He bound his arms tightly around Will as he came a second time, pushing him to come as well. Will threw his head back and let out a cry, his body tightening as his cock jetted heavily between their stomachs, coating them in streaks of white.

Hannibal fell back against the sofa with Will on him, both of them panting. Will buried his face in Hannibal's neck, smelling his scent deeply, as they both sought to catch their breaths.

"You smell good," he whispered.

Hannibal chuckled breathily, pressing soft kisses on Hannibal's cheekbone and the area just above his lips. Will faced him with a smile, looking down at those amber eyes that now looked at him with adoration. Will traced his lips with his thumb before enveloping his mouth with his in a searing kiss, their tongues rubbing.

Hannibal broke the kiss with a smack. "Would you like a drink?"

Will kissed him again. "I'd love a drink, if I'm able to let go of you."

He dragged his mouth along Hannibal's neck, biting, sucking and tasting it some more. Hannibal craned his neck with a sigh. Will ran his tongue in a wet trail from the base of Hannibal's throat all the way up to his chin, and flicked it over his lips.

"On second thoughts," he said. "Why do I need a drink when I had my fill of you?"

Hannibal caressed Will's cheek with the back of his fingers. "I figured you'd like some since you came in here that day and drank my wine out of my glass."

"Oh, that was yours?" Will said with feigned innocence as he slowly slid off Hannibal's lap and sat on the couch. "Alright, then."

Hannibal stood and padded towards the cupboard he usually kept his wine in. Will cocked his head, eyeing that firm, beautiful ass he wanted to take a bite of. There was something sexy about the way Hannibal walked, especially when he was naked. Those broad shoulders with impeccable posture, the flexing back muscles, the slim but solid waist and those hips that drove Will mad. He had a faint feeling he was stepping into uncharted territories with the doctor but he was too lost in this rapture to care.

Hannibal had already fallen for Will right from the second the man walked into his office with an air of self-assurance. He wanted to learn about him, and in the process of discovering him, Will had become his fixation. He didn't protest when Will invaded his personal space, or brazenly smelled him that day. If anything, it aroused him. Will wasn't the only one who couldn't get Hannibal off his mind. The doctor couldn't think about much else either. The fact he always eagerly looked forward to their appointments was telling a lot.

Will had this mystifying aura that matched Hannibal's in ways he couldn't explain, which was what grabbed his attention immediately, followed by the poise, the cool, suggestive

glances, lip smacks and smiles. Even now, the man stole the opportunity to seductively spread his thighs wide as he leaned back on the couch. His stomach and cock glistened with his cum, and seeing that raw flesh in all its glory tormented Hannibal. The temptation was strong. He wanted to go at it again with Will. Suck him off until he begged him to stop.

Good thing he had restraint when he needed it.

Hannibal went back to the couch with two glasses in one hand, and a bottle of red wine in the other.

“You are beautiful, you know that?” Will said.

“Likewise,” Hannibal replied, handing a glass to Will and pouring some wine into it. “You don’t seem too concerned about the case. I thought it was important.”

Will hummed, receiving the glass and swirling the liquid. “Because I know I’ll solve it, sooner or later. Call it arrogance or confidence, it doesn’t matter.”

“Self-assurance would be more appropriate. Belief in your capabilities, as you should have.”

Hannibal sat on the sofa and Will rose, moving to perch himself on Hannibal’s lap, sitting sideways with an arm around his shoulder and staring at him as he sipped the wine. Hannibal bound an arm around Will's waist, smiling fondly at him. He was falling harder and harder for the man, no matter how hard he tried to exercise restraint. His heart was tougher to control than he thought, breaking through the shackles he kept it captive in. Although he knew he couldn’t beat around the bushes either. Everything about Will was perfect—the warmth of his body, the firmness of his muscles, his voice, his breath, his face, eyes, lips, stubble, everything, every little aspect that made up his existence was a gift.

There was something intimate about the silence as well, to hear nothing but the sounds of each other’s breaths, and the little sips of wine.

“Can the two of us be candid for a moment?” Will asked.

“Of course,” Hannibal replied.

“I’ve been thinking about it. About love. And the things it makes you do.”

“Love is a madness in itself.”

“The feeling is foreign to me since I’ve never experienced it before. But I do know that you have to love a person profoundly to kill for them. You said if we were put in a difficult situation, we would do anything for the one we loved. So you think it’s right to kill someone, no matter the reason?”

“When it comes to love, the lines between right and wrong are blurred.”

“Would you really feel comfortable with killing?”

“If the situation compels me to.”

Will paused, his gaze softening. Hannibal saw the glimmer of vulnerability peeking through briefly, like Will was letting his guard down, and just as briefly, he allowed himself to do the same. Will caressed Hannibal's cheekbone tenderly before sealing his lips with another kiss, soft and warm and gentle this time. His lips tasted of Hannibal and wine. Hannibal reached up to brush his curls back, then cradled his cheek, letting his stubble graze his palm.

Will parted from the kiss with a soft pop and inched back, eyes meeting and tearing away from Hannibal's gaze as if he regretted having kissed him. Will looked elsewhere, and then kept looking in that direction for a moment.

"Is something wrong?" Hannibal asked.

"Nothing." Will slid off his lap.

Hannibal already missed the weight of him on his thighs. His entire body tingled from the after-effects of the heated intimacy. Will took a sip of the wine as he went to the small table beside one of the leather chairs. Keeping the glass on it, he took some tissues and wiped himself clean and dry. The silence was different this time and it made Hannibal slightly uncomfortable. He rose from the couch and went to him, placing his glass right next to where Will had kept his.

"Something's bothering you," he said, taking a tissue for himself. "Is it the killer?"

"It's the other killer," Will replied. "The Chesapeake Ripper."

Hannibal stopped midway through wiping himself. Will's back was turned to him so he couldn't see the expression on his face. When he came to think about it, Jack had mentioned the Ripper when he had visited the office. It was only logical Will would be on the same case too. Hannibal was so intrigued with Will he briefly forgot the cops were chasing the Ripper.

"What about him?" he asked.

"He fascinates me." Will disposed off the tissues in the small trash can in the corner, then proceeded to put his clothes on. "From what I've seen, there's a beauty to his killings. The one common link between his victims is that they've all misbehaved in some way, and the Ripper makes an example out of them. He doesn't waste anything either. Organs are stolen from the bodies and consumed."

Hannibal was impressed, simply by the fact that Will understood. So, maybe he was wrong about nobody being able to understand the Ripper. Maybe he underestimated the possibility. If anyone could get into the Ripper's mind, it was Will. Although Hannibal wasn't sure if that was a good thing.

After putting his trousers on, he put on his shirt and buttoned it. "Have you found any leads?"

"Not yet."

Though that gave Hannibal a bit of relief, it was short-lived. He sensed something had changed in the room's atmosphere, in Will's demeanor. Will put his shirt on, followed by the waistcoat, then the suit. He sat on the leather chair to put on his socks and shoes. His phone —sitting on the table beside him—buzzed. He answered the call.

"Bev?" A brief pause and then, "Good. I'll be there." He cut the call. "Beverly's found something that might help."

"It's progress," Hannibal replied, adjusting his tie and straightening his suit.

Will rose, and without even looking at the doctor, walked to the door, almost like he was avoiding him. Hannibal was about to ask when Will stopped midway and went to the Stag statue on the mantelpiece. He rubbed the antlers between his thumb and forefinger, then brought that forefinger to the pointed tip of the antler and pressed down a little.

"The nightmares get more vivid," he said. "I've also been sleepwalking for quite a long time."

"What do you see in the nightmare?" Hannibal asked.

"Usually, it's either the victims or the killers of the cases I investigate. But… after I began investigating the Ripper case, it's been different. All I see now is…" Will looked back at Hannibal. "A shade, haunting me wherever I go."

There was a shift in Will. Dark blue eyes replaced the bright, glimmering ones Hannibal usually saw, and a stern expression replaced that playful smirk. A kind of unease churned in Hannibal's gut.

Will didn't give him the chance to prod further. "Are you keeping secrets from me, Doctor Lecter?"

"We all have secrets," Hannibal replied. "You'll have to be more specific."

"Ones that could jeopardize us both."

It didn't take Hannibal long to figure out what secret Will referred to. He wasn't certain if the man knew the truth, and no matter how he answered the question, there would be consequences.

"No."

Will gave a single nod. "I should go then."

"Will—"

The profiler walked out, closing the door behind him.

Chapter 2

Shit.

Will hadn't planned on this. Sure, he gave in to the infatuation. Hannibal was unlike any other and his magnetism was hard to resist, but what he felt back there after the sex was unexpected. It was just supposed to be sex. A spur-of-the-moment thing, fueled by a sudden spark of desire. Will didn't expect it to be anything else, nor did he intend it. In that moment, however, seated on Hannibal's lap, he felt something inside he couldn't put a name to. Something warm, something he never felt before.

It was definitely much more than infatuation now.

It scared him, for the first time in his life. He had always been so sure of himself and his emotions, always keeping them in check. Flings were fine. One-night stands too. Those were easy. But love had always been complicated for him. The biggest reason being that Will had faced an insurmountable pain in his life—people abandoning him, betraying him, manipulating him, convincing him that love would only lead to heartbreak. That vulnerability was a weakness and he believed love was too, so he stayed away from it. He was doing a good job of it until now. For however fleeting a moment, he had allowed himself to be vulnerable near Hannibal and he didn't know why.

Then there were those nightmares he'd mentioned. He wasn't lying about the change in them. It happened after he had started the sessions with Hannibal. Even now, flashes of those nightmares appeared in his mind—a black figure of a man with sharp winding horns and ghostly white eyes, lurking around the corner, or simply standing nearby. An unsettling shadow following him everywhere.

Something about all of this was wrong but he couldn't put a finger on what. He couldn't deny what he felt about Hannibal, even though it happened in such a short time. He wasn't expecting it.

Damn it.

He arrived at the FBI headquarters. Beverly was waiting for him.

"Claudia D'Mello." Beverly handed Will a file as they walked to the interrogation room. "She was in a relationship with two of the victims, and was a friend to the other two. And she's not being cooperative."

"I'm guessing she's the killer's lover." Will glanced through the file, then handed it back to Beverly.

"Or she could just be a friend."

"The killer commits those murders out of obsessive love and jealousy. I highly doubt this is plain friendship."

Beverly huffed. “I mean it seems like a wild guess to say she’s his girlfriend.”

“It is a wild guess. I suppose there’s only one way to find out for sure. I need a notepad and a pen."

Beverly gave him what he asked for.

A young woman with her chestnut hair bound in a ponytail and hanging over her shoulder, was rubbing her hands agitatedly when Will entered.

She shot him a look. “Whatever you guys ask me, I’m not saying anything! You can’t keep me here!”

Her lips slightly trembled. Will’s demeanor turned gentle when he sensed her fear.

“You’re right,” Will said, taking a seat across the table from her. “We can’t keep you here. You are free to go. We just want to know about your boyfriend.”

Claudia inched back a little. If she had no connection with the killer, she could say so without hesitation. But her brief silence and flitting gaze spoke a lot.

"I don't know anything," she said.

Will leaned forward, placing his intertwined hands on the table. "I know you're scared. You have every right to be. But what you don't deserve is to live the rest of your life in fear. You know this isn't right. More people will die if you don't help us."

Claudia whimpered, tears running down her cheeks.

"Claudia, you're safe," Will reassured.

"No. He's watching me," she said, soft and shaky. "He knows who I talk to over the phone, where I go. He knows everything."

"Who? Who is watching you?"

"I can't tell you. He will kill you, and then he'll hurt me, and lock me up somewhere. I can't help you. Please let me go." She shut her eyes and broke down in soft sobs. "Please let me go."

Will exhaled slowly. "Alright."

Claudia looked at him again, slightly surprised he agreed that quickly. She probably expected him to push her with questions.

"But before that," he added. "I need you to know that you will spend the rest of your life shackled by this man. You've already spent too long living that way. You've been afraid too long. Be brave for once. Help us, and I will make sure he never hurts you or anyone ever again. You have my word."

Claudia looked thoughtful. Will opened the notepad and wrote his name and phone number on it before ripping out the page.

"When you decide to help us, you can call me on this number," he said, handing her the paper. "His killings won't stop until we stop him. There isn't a lot of time."

Claudia received it.

"You can go," he said.

Rising from the chair, Claudia stuffed the paper in her pocket and left the room. Shortly after, Will exited the room as well, meeting up with Beverly and Jack.

"Please tell me you have a plan," Jack said. "Because you let her go just like that."

"She'll come back," Will replied.

"How sure are you?" Beverly said.

"This killer's obsessive love is holding her captive," Will replied. "Sooner or later, she'll want to break out of the cage he's kept her in. She will, if she wants her freedom."

"I hope you're right," Jack said. "She's the only lead we've got."

"She's gonna come back."

Will was sure of it. He also had a fair idea about the killer, but the one person he couldn't figure out was his own psychiatrist. Hannibal Lecter was a dark spot in his mind, something nagging at him. Between the killer he was chasing and the Chesapeake Ripper, he was stuck in a confusing place. It felt like the answers were staring at him in the face but he couldn't see them.

His instincts kept telling him getting close to Hannibal was a bad idea. Unfortunately, Will had developed some feelings for Hannibal.

It felt like he couldn't turn back.

"Bev, can I talk to you alone?" he asked.

"Yeah," Beverly replied.

She followed him to a quiet corner.

"Is it possible to… have feelings for someone in a short time?" Will asked.

Beverly raised a brow. "You're seriously asking this question in a time like this? I knew you were always distracted but this takes it to a whole new level. You're not even worried about the case."

"The case isn't a big deal. I can solve it."

"And there's the narcissism. Good ol' Will."

Will huffed. "Humor me."

Beverly sighed. "I don't know. Yeah, maybe. Love at first sight and stuff." She paused. "You're seeing someone?"

"Well, yeah, I mean, kinda regularly."

There was another pause. Beverly's mouth parted in a slight smile, then she chuckled.

"Wait, it's Doctor Hannibal Lecter, isn't it?"

Damn it. So much for secrecy. "Look, it's complicated."

"Everything's complicated with you."

"This one really is, Bev. I have a bad feeling. I want to get close to him, I want to be around him always. I've never known myself as well as I know myself when I'm with him."

"So what's the problem?"

"That's what I can't figure out. I don't know if I want to find out."

Despite not knowing the answers, talking it out with Beverly at least gave Will a clarity on what he should do. If he wanted answers, he needed to dig deep, even if it meant holding Hannibal under suspicion. He had no choice.

***

Hunting came naturally to Hannibal, like breathing. He knew when to do it and how. Even now, tailing his newest victim—a doctor who happened to behave rudely to Hannibal during a check-up—Hannibal's focus was locked on his target. It was unfortunate the rude doctor's car had to break down in the middle of an empty street at night. Hannibal may or may not have had something to do with that.

A dark-haired man stepped out of the vehicle, opening the bonnet only to have plumes of smoke blow into his face. He coughed, trying to wave away the smoke. Hannibal pulled his car over and stepped out as well, walking to him. The man didn't notice Hannibal until he came close and by then, it was too late. The man suddenly felt an arm coil around his neck and squeeze the life out of him. His eyes bulged and he choked, desperately trying to break free of the iron grip.

Hannibal refused to let go even as the man kicked and flailed and wriggled. He delighted in the process of killing his victims intimately, either by hand or by knife. Guns were too loud, too clumsy, too much of a liability, and he couldn't savor the kill. Hannibal felt the man's body slowly go limp and his hands drop to his sides before he became still.

Easing his grip, Hannibal clutched his victim's body and dragged him back to his car. The rustling of leaves alerted him, and he glanced around. It was only the wind. Besides, nobody

could come here. Hannibal always made sure the coast was clear before he did anything.

Then again… the night felt different to him this time, though. The atmosphere was particularly uneasy, giving him a sense of foreboding. He took another look around, having this odd feeling like he was being watched.

He couldn’t tell if he was imagining it either.

***

The following morning, Will was in the forensics lab, waiting for Zeller and Price to get back with the results on a sample he had handed to them. His brooding eyebrows were pulled together, as he sat at the edge of a table with his arms crossed. His suit was hung on a chair. The coffee he had grabbed from a café on the way to the headquarters, sat on the table next to him, and had grown cold.

There were a lot of things going on and yet, Will's mind chose to ruminate on one thing. It upset him. He pinched his eyes, wondering if he had known what he knew now, would he have taken different decisions? Or would he still have followed his heart?

Perhaps it was easy, the way things used to be before. When he didn't care too much about anything, didn't have time for relationships or people in general. All he had was his nice house in Wolf Trap, and his seven dogs. Life never took it easy on him but at least, he had lesser things to worry about.

Zeller and Price came to him.

"The liver is a match with one of the victims we had found two weeks ago," Zeller said. "Angela McKay."

"Where did you find it?" Price asked.

"Doesn't matter," Will replied. "But some things are starting to make sense."

His phone rang. He fished it out of his pocket and answered it, "Agent Graham."

There was nervous breathing on the other end. And then, "This is Claudia."

Will looked at Zeller and Price who sent questioning glances at his phone. He walked out of the lab. "Claudia? Are you alright?"

"No," the young woman spoke. "You said I could call you."

"I'm glad you did."

"I don't want to say anything over the phone. Can we meet?"

"Sure. Where do you want to meet?"

"There's a park about eighteen minutes away from your… FBI building."

"I know it. I'll be there."

The call ended. Claudia was taking a risk by meeting with him. He had to watch out for her.

***

Will spotted Claudia under a tree, as if hiding from everyone, stealing paranoid glances all around. He took a quick glance around too, making sure nobody suspicious was loitering about. He walked to her.

"Thank you for calling me," he said.

She reached into her pocket and took out a piece of folded paper and handed it to him. "Whatever you need to know, you might find it here."

Will unfolded the paper and an address was scribbled on it. "Is this… his address?"

Claudia nodded. "He's obsessed with me. He doesn't want me to hang out with anyone too closely. I can't watch any more people die. Make sure you stop him."

"I promise."

Shoving her hands in her hoodie pocket, Claudia walked away briskly. She was clearly too scared to talk any more and Will couldn't push her. Besides, he had a feeling that he had what he needed.

***

Hannibal was arranging his things on his desk when he heard footsteps outside his door, followed by knocking. He went to receive the door. Opening it, he found a young man with dark hair, wearing a black sweatshirt. Not a patient Hannibal recognized. He had a sharp memory of the patients he was seeing.

"Do you have an appointment?" he asked.

"No," the man timidly replied. "I was referred to you. I need to talk, please."

Hannibal caught the faint whiff of cigarette smoke lingering around the man. Along with that, a strange aura he couldn't put his finger on.

"Come in," he said, allowing the man to enter.

The man walked in, looking around the office as he rubbed his hands together.

"It's fortunate that I have some time for you, Mister…"

"Oh, Raymond," the man replied. "You can call me Raymond."

"Mr. Raymond. Have a seat."

Raymond went to sit on one of the leather sofas while Hannibal settled down on the other, crossing his legs and leaning back. Raymond sat near the edge of his seat, restlessly fidgeting with his hands. Hannibal observed the man, waiting for him to speak.

"I'm… dealing with a lot of things," Raymond said. "Lots of… difficult decisions. I know I'm doing the right thing, but that doesn't make it easier."

"Doing the right thing is never easy," Hannibal replied. "Of course, that depends on your definition of right and wrong."

"Looking out for someone isn't wrong."

"You're protecting someone. From what?"

"From the world. It's actually my, uh, my girlfriend. I just want to protect her. Some people are after her. They want to separate us."

"Who are these people?"

"Friends, mostly. Or at least that's what they call themselves. These people are close to her but they never understand her, they don't know her as well as I do. They don't let her be herself. It's like they're suppressing her." Raymond looked at Hannibal. "If you had someone you care about, wouldn't you protect them? Would you like it if someone got in the way?"

That reminded Hannibal of Will. Being around people who only used him for their purposes, but never truly understood him. They never appreciated his gifts. Raymond's sentiments made a lot of sense to Hannibal in that aspect, and also gave him other thoughts. Thoughts that involved weeding out Will's friends and getting them far away from him solely because they didn't deserve him.

It also brought Hannibal to a realization of how deep his feelings for Will went. The short time he spent with Will shouldn't have affected him that much but his feelings had already taken root, their winding tendrils reaching into the dark depths of his heart. They didn't listen to rationalization.

Hannibal's thoughts drowned out Raymond's voice. All he could think of was how strongly he wanted Will.

And in some corner of his mind, he wondered if some part of Will felt the same.

***

The address Claudia provided Will led him and Beverly to a house in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by woods. Beverly glanced at the piece of paper to make sure the address was right.

"This is it," she said. "Seems empty."

"Or he could be hiding," Will said, checking the rounds in his gun.

With a click, he cocked the gun and raised it in front of him as he moved forward. Beverly moved along right by his side, watching his blind spots. The house was eerily quiet, with the only sounds being their muffled footsteps and the soft creaking of the floorboards beneath them. Try as they might, they couldn't be more silent than this.

Will gestured Beverly to split-up, and she obeyed with a nod. While she went upstairs, Will scoured the living room, the kitchen, and the hall before making his way out the back door. He came out to the backyard. There wasn't much out there save for some gardening tools and a lawnmower. Will glanced around before going back inside. The house was old and untidy, the air reeking of cigarettes, but nothing spelled suspicious or seemed out of the ordinary.

Will lowered his gun just a bit as he walked along the stairs. Maybe it was just him but the floorboards sounded… different… at one spot near the stairs. He stopped and glanced down, tapping his feet in different spots to test the sound. At one particular spot, the floor sounded… hollow.

He knelt to investigate, prodding about the floorboards until he felt something. More like pushed something. A button?

No, it was a handle.

He pulled it up to reveal a trap door, with stairs leading down to a dark basement of sorts. He produced a small flashlight from his coat pocket and held it up to light his way as he cautiously went down the creaky stairs. Further and further into the dusty darkness.

Down in the basement, his flashlight illuminated some photos on the wall. Ones of the previous murder victims. Dozens of snapshots of them walking in the street, or seen together with Claudia D'Mello.

Will shone the torch around until he found a pull chain. He tugged it and a bulb brightened the basement.

"Will!" came a voice from upstairs.

"Down here!" Will responded.

Footsteps sounded as Beverly came down to the basement, her mouth dropping at the spider's web of victims photographs.

"What the hell…" she said.

"He's been busy," Will replied.

His eyes finally fell on a singular photo of a man, one he'd recognize anywhere, even if it was half-hidden among a messy myriad of post-it notes and photographs. A photo with a circle drawn on it using a red sharpie.

"Hannibal," Will whispered.

***

"I assume now you want to get rid of whoever is getting in the way," Hannibal said.

"Yeah," Raymond replied. "It's why I had been following that agent around."

Hannibal immediately sensed the onset of danger, and realized who Raymond really was. He passed a quick glance at his desk where he had kept his scalpel. He wouldn't be able to get to it quickly. So he stole furtive glances at the glass next to him. Perhaps he could smash it on Raymond's head if necessary.

"That Will Graham—" Raymond reached to the back of his jeans and pulled a gun out of his waistband. "—has been interfering too long."

A gun.

Damn it.

There was no way Hannibal could alert Will. He thought of ways he could stall Raymond while coming up with a way to get rid of him.

"What about your girlfriend?" he asked. "You never bothered to think about what made her happy. You simply assumed, took control, and decided for her. Doesn't seem fair."

"I know what's good for her," Raymond said. "I know how to protect her. She doesn't know what she wants."

"I highly doubt that."

"You know, I knew I wouldn't be able to catch that agent if I went for him. That's why I found out about you, his psychiatrist. I got the feeling that if I came after you, he would find me."

Hannibal smirked a little. Man doesn't know what he's gotten himself into. Of course, Will would find him. And of course, Will would never spare him. Raymond wouldn't stand a chance against Will. Of that, Hannibal was certain. He had no doubts about Will's strength and capabilities. The only issue here is trying to stall Raymond until Will gets here, which was becoming increasingly difficult by the minute.

Raymond seemed volatile. The gun couldn't have been in worse hands.

"Will Graham is in my way." Raymond pointed the gun at Hannibal. "You're just collateral damage."

Hannibal grinned and snickered.

"What's so funny?" Raymond glared.

"Nothing," Hannibal replied. "Just that you're a coward."

"Excuse me?"

"You say you want to protect your girlfriend, yet you choose the most cowardly way to do it. I'd admire you if you went right for Will Graham. I'd figured you'd be clever enough to deal with him. Looks like I was wrong."

"Shut up. I will deal with him."

"I doubt it."

Raymond rose from his chair and closed the distance between them, bringing the gun closer to Hannibal's head.

"I said shut up," he snarled.

This was exactly what Hannibal wanted—for him to drop his guard. Because at a distance, he wouldn't have been able to disarm him. He was slightly concerned Raymond was going to shoot him back there.

But now the man gave him an opportunity to make a move.

Big mistake.

***

It made no sense to Will as to why the killer would go after Hannibal. He barely knew him.

Perhaps Hannibal wasn't the target.

He was the bait.

Maybe the killer intended to lure Will to him, or maybe he just wanted to kill everyone Will knew. Either way, the thought of Hannibal getting hurt made Will's stomach contract into a tight ball. His fingers squeezed the steering wheel, and his car's engine roared with the breakneck speed at which he drove. Along with the stab of anxiety, came a swell of anger.

If the killer lay a hand on Hannibal, I fucking swear to God…

Though he was worried about Hannibal, Will wasn't sure what he actually felt about him, now that he knew the truth. A whirlwind of emotions raged in him, baffling him. Right now, Hannibal's safety was top priority. Everything else came later.

He screeched to a halt in front of Hannibal's office, nearly stumbling as he scrambled out of the car. He slammed the car door and pulled a gun out of his holster as he hurried to the building.

Entering, he half-walked, half-jogged to Hannibal's office. As he drew closer, he heard loud crashes, grunts and growls, then a heavy thud. Snapping the gun up, Will walked to the door and shot a kick to it. The door burst open and he barged in. The first thing he saw was the killer and Hannibal wrestling over a gun, and it seemed Hannibal had the upper hand, despite the bruises on his face. Will couldn't get a clear shot.

But at Will's entry, Hannibal's gaze flitted to him for a second. That tiny moment of distraction was enough for the killer to headbutt Hannibal, then coil an arm around his neck. His gun hand flew to Hannibal's temple, pressing the muzzle to it.

"Stop!" Will exclaimed. "Don't do it, Raymond!"

"If you take another step, I will," Raymond replied, tightening his grip around Hannibal's neck.

Hannibal grunted, clutching at the killer's arm. "Will… shoot him."

"I can't hurt you!" Will said.

"Don't worry about me," Hannibal said.

"Listen to him, Agent." Raymond snarled. "Shoot me. Or I'll shoot him."

Will's heart pounded. "Don't do this. He has nothing to do with this. I'm the one you want. Let him go."

"What, so you can shoot me?"

"You let him go and I'll put my gun down. Kill me if you want."

Raymond chuckled. "You must think of me as a fool. If I let him go, he'd just fight back. He's got some skills."

"Will…" Hannibal gasped. "Kill him."

"Shut up," Will said, jaw clenching.

"Just kill him. It doesn't matter if I die."

"I said shut up!"

Raymond moved to the side, dragging Hannibal with him. And as he did, Will circled around, keeping his aim locked on him. Raymond neared the metal ladder. Will's gaze flitted briefly to the ladder, a spontaneous idea sparking in his mind. It was a risky shot. The tiniest miscalculation could cost Hannibal's life and Will couldn't afford that.

A bead of sweat ran down Will's temple. His clothes felt too hot and he could hear his heartbeat drumming in his ears. *One shot. One chance. Only a few seconds.*

Will moved his gun to the ladder next to Raymond and fired. The bullet ricocheted off the metal and struck Raymond in the temple. His head snapped to the side, and he fell, releasing his grip on Hannibal. Will closed his eyes for a moment and exhaled a gust of air in relief. His gun lowered. When he opened them, he saw Hannibal breathing heavily, rubbing his neck and tugging at his shirt collar to loosen it a bit.

"Risky shot," Hannibal said. "Your gun skills are immaculate. I'm glad you showed up in time."

Will stared at him, slowly raising his gun at him. This hadn't ended yet. The truth was yet to come to light.

At the sight of the muzzle pointed at him, Hannibal's mouth parted in surprise. "Will."

"I really was blind," Will said. "Or maybe that was your intention. To blind me."

"I don't understand—"

"Don't you? You should, considering the fact that you've been lying to me all along, Hannibal. Or should I call you the Chesapeake Ripper?"

Hannibal stilled for a moment, tilting his head ever so slightly. "I'm not sure what you're talking about."

"Don't." Will seethed. "Don't. I'm a fucking profiler, Hannibal. Don't bother playing that game with me. I sneaked into your house the other night and searched the place. I found all the meat in the freezers, too much for one person. It didn't feel right, especially not after I saw you butchering a man and stealing his organs that night."

The polite, unassuming aura Hannibal had switched in an instant with his posture. He straightened himself, raising his chin a little. A kind of icy darkness washed over his face, as though the man Will knew all along had only been a masquerade. He regretted allowing his vulnerabilities to show in front of Hannibal. It made him realize why he'd been avoiding love in the first place.

This. This heartbreak was what he had tried to steer clear from. It hurt a lot more when that heartbreak was caused by betrayal. A breach of trust.

"So, that was you. I didn't expect anyone to be present there," Hannibal said. "Although I did feel like I was being watched. I knew you'd find out, eventually. You're special. I saw your gifts right from the moment I met you."

"Stop…" Will shook his head. "I didn't pretend in front of you. Not once. I fucking bared myself to you completely, and you've been hiding behind a pretense. I always get those nightmares for a reason. I should've known. Do you know what I see in them?"

Will side-eyed the stag statue on Hannibal's mantelpiece as a gesture. Hannibal glanced at it, then gave a subtle nod.

"You've seen the signs early on," he said. "You would've seen the truth a lot earlier if you had paid attention to them. You chose to ignore them."

Will felt heat flood his cheeks and his eyes tear up. "Yes. I did."

"Why?"

Will's jaw clenched and his grip tightened around the gun so much his hand trembled. "Because I trusted you. Because I thought you were my friend. Because…" his emotions choked him.

"Because you fell in love with me."

Hannibal said it so easily, like it was inconsequential, not realizing that those words stabbed Will with the force of a crossbow.

Will strode over to him, pointing the gun at his head at point blank range. "The cops are already on their way here. You have nowhere to escape, you son of a bitch."

"I don't intend to escape," Hannibal said, so coolly that Will wondered if the man felt an iota of fear. If he even was capable of that.

"I know you could disarm me if you wanted to."

"It wouldn't be easy for me to disarm you, Will. You're capable of putting up a fight."

"But you *would* put up a fight. You wouldn't just stand here and let me hold you at gunpoint. So, why aren't you fighting back?" Will's voice rises. "WHY?"

"... I let my emotions take the wheel for the first time in my life." There was a faint glimmer of emotion in Hannibal's eyes. One that could easily be overlooked. "I don't want to fight you, Will. No one's ever made me feel the way you do in such a short span of time."

Will's breath shuddered. He'd never been in a predicament such as this before. He hated the conflict.

The two of them heard the shuffle of boots outside. Most likely Jack Crawford and a bunch of FBI agents.

Hannibal took a deep breath as he glanced at the door. "The decision is yours." He looked back at Will. "What happens henceforth is in your hands. You are the judge, jury and executioner."

Will lowered his gun, because in that split-second before the agents barged in, his heart had made the choice for him.

"Sit down, Hannibal," he said. "I'm pretty sure you know how to play the victim."

The slightest of smiles crept on Hannibal's face as he obeyed will and took a seat by his desk, exhaling and pretending to be the assaulted victim.

The agents barged in, led by Jack, who held a gun in front of him. He looked at the dead body on the floor then and Will and Hannibal.

"What the hell happened?" he exclaimed.

"The killer attacked Hannibal," Will replied. "He tried to use Hannibal to get to me. He knew I was onto him. I was an obstacle he needed to wipe out."

Jack glanced at Hannibal, then called the medics to tend to his wounds. Will gave Hannibal a last look, unsure of what to feel anymore. The second he felt his eyes dampen, he looked away and left the place. Jack Crawford could take over from there.

Will was done.

However, the second he stepped out into the street, Hannibal's voice stopped him.

"Will!"

He shut his eyes and exhaled a gust of air. He couldn't even get away if he wanted to. It was frustrating. His lips thinned to a hard line as he turned around and faced Hannibal.

"Don't you want to know how it ends?" Hannibal asked. "You came this far. Don't you want to know the truth? Everything there is to know about me?"

"Whatever I know about you so far has ripped a part of my soul from me," Will replied. "I don't think I'm prepared to know what lies behind your person suit, Hannibal."

"Your curiosity still gets the better of you." Hannibal walked closer, fingers brushing along Will's hand as he held it. "You want this, yet you lie to yourself otherwise." His face was mere inches apart, making it hard for Will to ignore. "Come with me. I'll give you all the answers you need, and much more. Everything you wish to know."

"Hannibal—"

"Come with me." Hannibal whispered.

Will looked away, jaw clenching. He knew, he knew, deep down… what the answer was. He suppressed it and stared at Hannibal square in the eyes.

"No."

He pulled his hand free and walked away, exhaling a shuddering breath. That was a rabbit hole he didn't want to fall in, knowing fully well he'd fall forever. And he'd never have a chance to turn back, should it all go wrong.

He could sense Hannibal staring after him from behind, but he kept walking.

Didn't turn back.

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The pencil shaded the features of Will's face with precision. Hannibal took care of the details. As he delicately sketched Will's jawline, he imagined he was running his fingers along that part of Will's face, feeling the stubble, the lips, the chin.

There were footsteps outside. Hannibal stopped sketching and looked up. Dropping the pencil on the canvas, he stood from his chair and walked to the door. On opening it, he found Will, facing the other way. The earthy fragrance that had become a trademark of him, lingered around him, wafting into Hannibal's office.

Will turned around—hair as immaculate as it always was—wearing a salmon shirt, with his coat hung on his arm.

Hannibal smiled. "I would be lying if I said I never expected you to come back."

"I didn't want to," Will replied.

"So, why are you here?"

Will took a few steps forward. "Because I want to know."

Only Hannibal could understand what he meant and he had been waiting for this.

Will knew the rabbit hole he was going into but he went into it knowing Hannibal would hold his hand on the way down.

As he passed by Hannibal, he gave a smirk. The Will Graham style smirk, and Hannibal's smile stretched wider, making his eyes crinkle.

He shut the door after Will and turned to him. "Shall we start?"

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